

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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INFO USIA WASHDC

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, PFOR, CSCE, HU

SUBJ: HUNGARIAN TELEVISION STAGES EAST-WEST DEBATE ON CSCE,
DETENTE AND ARMS REDUCTION

1. IN WHAT IS A MAJOR NEW STEP FOR HUNGARIAN MEDIA, AND
MAY WELL BE A FIRST FOR SOCIALIST COUNTRIES, HUNGARIAN
TELEVISION STAGED ON PRIME-TIME AUGUST 18 THE SECOND OF
A SERIES OF DIRECT OPEN DEBATES BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN
MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES, ON THE SUBJECTS OF CSCE, DETENTE AND
ARMS REDUCTION.

2. THE FIRST PROGRAM, WHICH WAS SHOWN IN MAY, AND WHICH THE
WESTERN PARTICIPANTS WERE A WEST GERMAN AND AN ITALIAN
CORRESPONDENT, RECEIVED ALMOST NO ADVANCE PUBLICITY AND WAS
NOT SEEN BY EMBOFFS. THE APPARENT SUCCESS OF THIS
FIRST ATTEMPT HOWEVER LED TO A DECISION TO MAKE THE
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PROGRAM "INTERNATIONAL FORUM" A REGULAR ONE, AND THE

SECOND SHOW ALREADY RECEIVED CONSIDERABLY MORE ATTENTION.

3. THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE AUGUST 18 PROGRAM WERE THEO SOMMER, EDITOR OF DIE ZEIT, ANTHONY COLLINGS, NEWSWEEK BONN EDITOR, ALBRECHT MOLLE, FOREIGN AFFAIRS EDITOR OF GDR RADIO AND ALEXANDER DRUZSHININ OF MOSCOW RADIO AND TELEVISION. HOST WAS JANOS HAJDU OF HUNGARIAN TELEVISION, AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMENTATOR OF HSWP DAILY NEPSZABADSAG.

4. THE SHOW WAS A CONTRAST TO A MOSCOW ORIGINATED DISCUSSION ON US-SOVIET RELATIONS WHICH WAS SHOWN ON HUNGARIAN TELEVISION A FEW WEEKS AGO, AND WHICH FEATURED TAPED COMMENTS BY SENATORS HUGH SCOTT AND JAMES ALLEN WITH SUBSEQUENT REBUTTALS BY GEORGE ARBATOV AND ANOTHER SOVIET COMMENTATOR. HERE THE PARTICIPANTS FACED EACH OTHER DIRECTLY, AND USING THE AID OF A BATTERY OF SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETERS AND EARPHONES, COULD DISCUSS AND RAISE SUBJECTS FREELY AND REBUT ARGUMENTS IMMEDIATELY.

5. TO OUR GREAT SURPRISE, EVERYONE RECEIVED EXACTLY EQUAL TIME. THE BEST PREPARED AND MOST SKILLED DEBATER WAS THEO SOMMER OF DIE ZEIT, WHO DEFTLY TICKED OFF MULTIPLE STATISTICS ON THE INCREASED PACE OF AMRS BUILD-UP AMONG WARSAW PACT FORCES, SPOKE OPENLY OF THE FEARS IN THE WEST ARISING FROM MOSCOW'S AGGRESSIVE FOREIGN POLICY, REFERRED TO 14,000 CUBAN TROOPS IN ANGOLA AND EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT EXTENSIVE WESTERN CREDITS TO SOCIALIST COUNTRIES MADE IT EASIER FOR THEM TO SPEND MORE OF THEIR OWN RESOURCES ON ARMAMENTS.

6. COLLINGS HAD A SOMEWHAT MORE BENIGN APPROACH, BUT DID SPEAK OF DOMESTIC U.S. POLITICAL CONCERS ABOUT UNILATERAL SOVIET ADVANTAGES IN DETENTE, EXPLAINED THAT NOT ONLY CRUISE MISSILES BUT ALSO BACKFIRE BOMBERS CREATED PROBLEMS WITH SALT, AND SAID THAT WHILE THE U.S. MAY HAVE ITS CONSERVATIVES, THE SOVIET UNION ALSO HAD ITS HAWKS WHO OPPOSED DETENTE. THE LATTER POINT WAS THE ONLY ONE WHICH DREW AN INSTANT AND PASSIONATE DENIAL BY DRUZSHININ.

7. BOTH SOMMER AND COLLINGS KEPT DETAILED NOTES DURING THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEBATE WHICH WAS TAPED SEVERAL DAYS PRIOR TO SCREENING. AFTER THE PROGRAM WAS SHOWN, A POINT BY POINT REVIEW WITH THE PAO WAS MADE TO DETERMINE WHAT MATERIAL, IF ANY, WAS CUT OR MODIFIED. THIS REVIEW INDICATED THAT NO TAMPERING WHATEVER OCCURRED WITH THE ORIGINAL TAPE WITH THE EXCEPTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ONE SINGLE SENTENCE OF THEO SOMMER'S IN WHICH HE CALLED THE SOVIET UNION AN EXPANSIONIST, IMPERIALIST POWER.

8. FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE VIEWER THE PROGRAM MUST HAVE OFFERED A TRULY UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR BOTH SIDES OF THE EAST-WEST ISSUES DEBATED FAIRLY AND OPENLY BY ARTICULATE EXPONENTS OF BOTH SIDES. FROM AN EMBASSY VIEWPOINT ALL STATEMENTS BASICALLY REFLECTED WELL-KNOWN POSITIONS OF BOTH SIDES, BUT TO HEAR WESTERN ARGUMENTS MADE OPENLY ON HUNGARIAN TELEVISION WAS CERTAINLY A STARTLING NEW EXPERIENCE.

9. THE TWO SOCIALIST PANELISTS WERE OF COURSE WELL PREPARED, AND ABLY RATTLED OFF ALL THEIR USUAL ARGUMENTS. BUT THEY DID NOT GET THE LAST WORD, AND THEY WERE NOT SKILLED ENOUGH TO REBUT EVERYTHING SOMMER SAID, SINCE UNDER THE EVEN-HANDEDLY ENFORCED RULES OF THE DEBATE HE WAS ABLE TO COME UP WITH COUNTERARGUMENTS FASTER THAN HIS OPPONENTS COULD COME UP WITH REBUTTALS.

10. COMMENT: THIS RATHER DARING NEW VENTURE BY HUNGARIAN TELEVISION, ALONG WITH SOME OTHERS REPORTED RECENTLY SUCH AS THE PROGRAM ON HUNGARIAN-AMERICANS, THE EXTENSIVE FIRST-HAND COVERAGE OF BOTH THE DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN POLITICAL CONVENTIONS, AND THE INTERVIEW WITH BISHOP ZOLTAN KALDY ABOUT HIS U.S. TRIP, OFFER ENCOURAGING EVIDENCE THAT HUNGARIANS ARE INDEED MINDFUL OF CSCE IMPLEMENTATION. BUDAPEST 2769, ANALYZING RECENT HUNGARIAN POSITIONS ON CSCE, INDICATES THAT AS FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE HERE THE GOH SEEMS TO BE OUT IN FRONT OF MOST OF ITS FELLOW SOCIALIST COUNTRIES. IN THE INFORMATION FIELD, THE EARLY SUPPORTING EVIDENCE SEEMS TO BE WORTHY OF NOTE.
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